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THE PARK MOVEMENT IN MADISON, WISCONSIN

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The park movement in our city has had an exceptional, if not a unique, development. It has been practically a private enterprise, carried out by private individuals with private funds raised by popular subscription administered by a private corporation, acting as trustee for the city.

Our city is situated upon the borders of three lakes, Mendota, Monona and Wingra, named in order of their size. The state university is situated on the south shore of Lake Mendota, occupying about a mile of lake front. Through these grounds driveways open to the general public were laid out about thirty years ago. Later, one of our public-spirited citizens, Mr. George Raymer, laid out a very interesting driveway upon land which he owned overlooking the lake, two or three miles outside the city.

In 1892 a movement was started to construct a driveway along the lake shore from the University Driveway to the Raymer Drive. This involved unusual difficulties, as it was necessary to cross a soft marsh more than half a mile in width. Several persons interested in the work organized themselves into a committee and opened a preliminary campaign. Prominent citizens were induced to write letters to the newspapers over their own signatures, urging the desirability of the driveway. Even "Old Settler," "Inquirer" and "Pro Bono Publico" gave us the benefit of their influence. When sufficient interest had been excited, subscription papers were circulated and \$6,000 was raised, which was expended by the committee in 1892 and 1893.

After the driveway was constructed it became obvious that some organization was necessary in order to look after and maintain it, and in 1894 the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association was incorporated, without capital stock, to acquire and hold lands in trust for the city for park and pleasure driveway purposes, both outside and inside the city. At first only those who contributed \$25 or more each year were entitled to membership,

but later the annual membership was cut down to \$5. For several years the work of the association was confined to maintaining and extending driveways outside the city limits, the largest undertaking being the Farwell Drive along the east shore of Lake Mendota from the city to and through the grounds of the State Hospital for the Insane at Mendota. This was done at a cost of something more than \$10,000, the money all being subscribed in one year.

In 1899 eighteen acres of a tract of soft marsh in the city limits, lying near the outlet to Lake Mendota and along the canal connecting it with Lake Monona, was acquired for park purposes, \$5,000 of the cost being contributed by Mr. Tenney, whose name the park now bears. As material for filling was scarce, lagoons were constructed and the material excavated was used in filling the remainder of the park.

The work of improving the driveways and completing the park was continued until 1903, when a still more ambitious project was undertaken. This was the deepening of the channel between Lakes Mendota and Monona and the construction of a lock at the outlet of Lake Mendota. In order to make a clearance of eight feet, several city bridges and four railroad bridges had to be raised and the railroads were obliged to elevate their tracks upon either shore for considerable distances. The special subscription for this work for the year 1903 was something more than \$20,000. The city bore the expense of the construction of the city bridges, and the railroads, in rebuilding bridges and raising tracks, expended about \$40,000. In its completed state the Yahara Parkway consists of a channel about a mile in length, bordered on each side for nearly the whole distance with a parkway from 50 to 100 feet in width, laid out with walks and driveways and planted with trees and flowering shrubs. The lock and the deepened channel afford launches and power boats ready access from one lake to the other, and during the summer season it is thronged with pleasure boats. Fine residences are beginning to be built upon the filled land fronting it.

The object-lesson afforded by the improvement and development of Tenney Park made the desirability of parks in other localities so evident that in 1904 Senator Vilas purchased a tract of land adjacent to the third of our lakes, Lake Wingra, at an expense of \$18,000, and contributed an additional sum of \$10,000 for the

purpose of its improvement. The land purchased had been platted as an addition to the city, but never had been built upon, owing to its location adjacent to the lake. Although called a lake by courtesy, it was really only about one-quarter water, the remainder being a bog covered by cat-tails and bulrushes and entirely impassable except when frozen. The money for improving the park was expended in pumping material from the outer edge of this tract of bog and filling up about thirty-six acres of bog adjacent to the twenty-four acres of land purchased. A considerable area of the bog was cleared out and the adjacent lake was deepened to 8½ feet.

Two years later another of our wealthy citizens contributed \$16,000 for the purpose of making a park on Lake Monona, now called Brittingham Park in honor of the donor. This was constructed upon a bay separated from the main body of the lake by two railroad tracks. The shore was boggy, and as it had been for years the dumping-ground of all sorts of refuse it had come to be a disgrace to the city. This park with its additions, made possible by Mr. Brittingham's gifts, is a mile or more in length and about twenty acres in area, and has cleaned up and beautified a portion of the lake shore which was very obnoxious. Mr. Brittingham has also contributed \$7,500 for a bathhouse in the park, which is just completed.

While this other work was going on, Tenney Park was doubled in size by acquiring the remainder of the tract adjacent to it, and the improvement of this addition is now nearly completed. In this we were again aided by the contributions of Mr. Tenney.

The growth and popularity of the work are strikingly shown by a *resumé* of the contributions received. As before stated, the amount subscribed to start the work in 1892 was \$6,000. In 1894 and 1895, when the work was limited to maintenance, the amounts received were respectively \$655 and \$995. In 1896, when the first driveway was macadamized, \$1,580 was raised. In 1897, to construct the driveway to the state hospital, the subscription was \$10,160. In 1898 the amount raised was \$2,171. In 1899, exclusive of \$5,778 subscribed for Tenney Park, \$3,231 was subscribed for the general work of the association. The next four years the subscriptions were \$5,313, \$5,286, \$5,409 and \$5,036, besides, in the latter year, 1903, \$20,621 raised for the Yahara Parkway. In 1904 the general subscription was \$5,665, besides a special subscription

of \$4,658 for the Parkway. In the same year, besides Senator Vilas' gift of \$18,000 to purchase land for Henry Vilas Park, \$10,000 was specially subscribed for its improvement; \$1,100 was subscribed for improving Monona Lake Park, besides other subscriptions amounting to \$418. The next year the contributions, including \$5,600 for an addition to Tenney Park and \$8,000 for Brittingham Park, amounted to \$34,601. In 1906 they amounted to \$18,441; in 1907 to \$15,741; in 1908, including a gift of \$7,500 for the erection of a bathhouse during the present year, \$29,966; for 1909, including a bequest of twelve acres of land valued at \$15,000, the contributions amount to \$27,380. This makes the total amount of subscriptions from 1892 to April 27, 1909, \$242,669. In this sum is counted only the money contributed directly to the association by private individuals, and it does not take into account any of the moneys expended by the railroad companies or appropriated by the city, nor does it take into account gifts to the city amounting to \$56,000 for lands and small parks and playgrounds and for the \$10,000 memorial bridge contributed by Hon. Halle Steensland, which forms one of the finest features of the Yahara Parkway.

In connection with the amount subscribed it should be noted that the population of Madison when this work commenced was about 13,000, and that its population has just about doubled in the seventeen years that the work has been in progress.

As the result of this effort, the association owns fourteen miles of pleasure drives outside the city, of which nine have macadamized pavement. It has 142 acres of land in driveways and parks outside the city, and 155 acres of parks inside the city. Besides the canal in the Yahara Parkway, we have a canal two miles in length connecting Lake Monona with Lake Wingra. Practically all of these parks have been reclaimed from ground which was offensive and unsightly, if not unhealthy, by reason of its natural or acquired condition.

That the work is a popular one is shown not only by the aggregate of the gifts, but by the subscriptions in detail. The first year of our corporate existence we had twenty-six subscribers. Last year the general subscription for improvement and maintenance was about \$8,400. Of this there was one subscription of \$1,000, two subscriptions of \$200 each, one subscription of \$100, one sub-

scription of \$75, seven subscriptions of \$50 each, one subscription of \$30, nine subscriptions of \$25, one subscription of \$20, twenty-six subscriptions of \$15 each, one hundred and fifty-two subscriptions of \$10 each, one subscription of \$8, one subscription of \$7, three hundred and ninety-three subscriptions of \$5 each and ninety-five subscriptions of smaller amounts. It will be noticed that more than one-half of the subscribers paid \$5 each, and that nearly one-quarter of the whole subscription was made by those paying that sum.

The association holds the parks and drives which have been donated to it in trust for the benefit of the city of Madison. Its officers, with two exceptions, are elected in annual meeting. The two exceptions are the mayor, who is *ex officio* a director, and one alderman elected annually by the common council. The corporation is absolutely non-partisan and non-political. There never has been any question raised as to the politics or religion of any officer or director. Our president was Prohibition candidate for governor, and for many years we had the leading brewer in the city upon our board, as well as a Catholic priest.

The money raised by subscriptions, as well as the money appropriated to us by the city of Madison, is spent entirely under the direction of the association, without dictation or supervision by the city, but we have been careful from the beginning to publish and furnish our members with detailed reports of the expenditures made. We nominate the park superintendent and he is elected by the common council, but otherwise all of the employees are employed by us and are solely responsible to us. It is a matter of common remark that our work has been done more economically than it could have been done by employees of the city, probably owing to closer supervision. There has never been the slightest suspicion of politics or influence in connection with the employment of any person, or in connection with anything done by the association.

Although the work has been so largely a private and personal enterprise, yet the city has given it substantial support. Up to date it has issued bonds to the amount of \$84,500; it has levied a direct tax of \$8,000 to secure park lands, and it has expended enough more upon streets and sewers necessitated by park construction to bring the total up to \$103,413. This amount, however, will be very considerably increased by work done during the present year in

macadamizing streets leading through two of the parks. This year we have had an annual tax levy of $\frac{1}{2}$ mill, and the same is provided for the coming year. The relations of the city and the association have always been very harmonious, and, generally speaking, they have always done for us whatever we have asked them to do.

Not the least interesting feature of the work is its effect upon our city and upon our citizens. It may be doubted if we really realize how great the benefit has actually been. There has been a very general awakening of interest and pride in the city and an increasing desire for its improvement. To this interest and pride has been added a sense of responsibility and a willingness to co-operate for the common benefit. There has also come a sense of obligation which has led to the giving of a number of small tracts of land within the city for playgrounds and small parks for breathing spaces, and of gifts outside the city for the extension of our driveways. We have a bequest of \$2,000 for a memorial drinking fountain, and a prominent citizen, recently deceased, left us a tract of twelve acres on the lake, just outside the city limits, which will make another beautiful park. The construction of Brittingham Park has led to the reclamation and filling of the whole of the remaining shore of the bay, and property owners have conveyed to us a strip a mile long, next to the water, for a driveway. The habit of giving, which our association has so sedulously cultivated, has aided rather than hindered the various charitable and benevolent enterprises in behalf of which subscription papers have been presented to our citizens.

It is proper to say a word concerning the financial results of the work. When the matter of the appropriation of the $\frac{1}{2}$ -mill tax for the benefit of the association was before the city council a committee was appointed by the mayor to determine what percentage of increased assessment, if any, was due to the work of the association and the city in establishing and maintaining parks and driveways. The committee, which included a justice of the Supreme Court and a member of the State Tax Commission, after an elaborate investigation which involved a comparison of the rates of increase in a number of Wisconsin cities, reported that, in their opinion, from 10 to 15 per cent. of the increase in the value of taxable property is "attributable to the establishment of parks, drives, playgrounds and open spaces in and about Madison, by and through the activities of the city, its citizens and the Park and

Pleasure Drive Association.” Put in dollars and cents, the increase is from \$1,600,000 to \$2,400,000 and the annual return at the present rate of taxation is from \$24,000 to \$36,000 annually. This is truly an enormous return for the investment. In excess of the interest on the bonds, the annual tax levy to meet the bonds at maturity and the annual charge for maintenance, the city is deriving an income of many thousands of dollars.

One illustration of the increase in value due to park work will be given. In 1905 we purchased about twenty acres for an addition to Tenney Park for \$8,500. To obtain money to fill the remainder we platted about one-sixth of the tract along one side into twenty lots, which brought us \$20,000 after they had been filled by us at a cost of less than \$150 per lot. Our experience has amply verified the general proposition upon which the promoters of parks have ever insisted, that no city can make an investment which will yield longer or surer returns than an investment in parks and driveways.